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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a project that sought to examines students' perceptions of the meaning of school violence, its impact on their schooling experience, and the effectiveness of current strategies for dealing with violent behaviors. Interviews were conducted with 60 students in grades 7-9 (in groups of 12) drawn from 5 K-9 schools in central Alberta, Canada. The study found that: (1) Students considered the threat of physical violence to be more prevalent than actual physical violence; (2) more students were victims of verbal harassment than physical conflict; (3) students considered responses to violence to be inconsistent, unfair, and ineffective; (4) students perceived the junior high environment as being less caring than their elementary school experience; (5) teachers' expectations of students were difficult to change and were perceived by students as influencing punishment and assumption of guilt; and (6) students felt that too much emphasis was placed on punitive responses to violence, rather than being offered viable alternatives to resolving conflict. In conclusion, maintaining school safety requires a comprehensive strategy that regards discipline as an opportunity to teach students social skills, rather than as a way to punish social illiteracy. Policies are needed that focus on preventing serious disruptive behaviors, as well as the rehabilitation of all students who are affected by such behaviors--victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. Students also need to be given opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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The "De-Meaning" of Schools: Seeking a Safe and Caring Environment

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Purpose of the Study

In 1995, the Ministry of Education in Alberta, Canada developed the *Safe and Caring Schools Initiative*. The goals of this three-year initiative are: (a) to better understand the nature and extent of violence in Alberta's schools, (b) to provide an understanding of the complex issues underlying serious disruptive and violent behaviours, and (c) to develop and implement recommended practices and policies designed to effectively deal with such problems. As part of this undertaking, the three Alberta faculties of education were asked to work collaboratively in an effort to provide perspectives for understanding that would lead to the development of policies, practices, and programs aimed at reducing serious disruptive and violent behaviors in schools.

This paper introduces one such project which sought to examine students' perceptions of: (a) the meaning of school violence, (b) its impact on their schooling experience, and (c) the effectiveness of current strategies that educators practice in dealing with violent behaviors.

Relationship to Existing Research and Literature

The problem of school violence is of widespread concern in Canadian communities, reflecting increased alarm over societal violence. A survey of police services and school boards across Canada (Gabor, 1995) found that 80% of respondents felt that there was more violence in schools now than what existed 10 years ago. Thirty percent considered the situation "much worse" and none believed that the incidence of school violence was lessening.

This concern over school violence and serious disruptive behaviors has initiated somewhat sporadic Canadian research about the nature and extent of the problem. Even fewer data have been collected in Alberta. The Smith, Bertrand, Arnold and Hornick study (1995) of 962 junior and senior high school students in Calgary, identified nine types of victimizations: "something damaged, something stolen, something taken by force, threatened, slapped or kicked, threatened with weapon, attacked by group/gang, someone exposed themselves, sexually touched against will." Of these, something stolen (55.6%), something damaged (43.6%), being threatened (42.3%), and being slapped or kicked (37.1%) were the most prevalent victimizations identified amongst students.

A survey of 231 Edmonton area junior high school students (MacDonald, 1995), found that over one-half of students had experienced physical forms of violence (e.g., fights, bullying, punching, hitting,

grabbing), verbal threats and theft or damage of property. One-fifth of male students indicated that they had been threatened with a weapon at school. Sexual harassment was experienced by over 25% of female students, and ethnic conflict affected one-quarter of the student participants. Despite the fact that only 4% of students responded that they never felt safe at school, 20% of students observed weapons and over 50% considered bullying to be "very big" or "big" problems. Students were divided between resolving conflict physically without the aid of teachers, and intentionally not reporting victimization from a fear of reprisal. Perceptions of ineffective consequences for perpetrators, the lack of teacher awareness of incidents, and a perceived lack of teacher concern for victims were additional factors which exerted pressure on students to normalize violence or develop alternate strategies such as taking matters into their own hands through retaliation.

Although there is agreement that the sources of youth violence are complex and multi-faceted, there is less consensus on which criteria should be used in determining the most effective responses. Criminologists and police, for example (Gabor, 1995), believe that the swiftness and certainty of punishment are more influential than the severity of the punishment. And yet, teachers' federations (e.g., BCTF, 1994) and school boards (e.g., ASBA, 1993) have lobbied the government to stiffen penalties for perpetrators of violence. Zero tolerance policies, which seek to punish or suppress serious disruptive or violent behaviors, are gaining popularity at a time when boards are also being encouraged to adopt alternatives-to-suspensions programs (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995).

A 1994 nationwide survey in the United States (Honeywell, 1995), revealed that over 80 percent of the teachers (N=258) , suggested solutions to school violence could be realized through improved parenting skills, smaller class sizes, and stricter discipline practices. Most students favored broader class choices, family support services, smaller class size, and student involvement in discipline problems. Such holistic approaches are believed to more fairly and effectively balance the rights of the offenders with those of the majority of students who are not directly engaged in violent acts.

Unfortunately, school boards and administrators often view increased sanctions as an effective component of a violence prevention plan, and fail to review the validity of traditional policies which outline behavior codes and consequences for misbehavior (Day et al., 1995). Such simplistic measures continue, despite field experience (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1995) that demonstrates the benefits of increased attention on strategies which address positive and preventative practices, not just punitive responses. Everyday disruptive behavior, which can often escalate into school violence, can sometimes be attributed to the policies and practices of schools (Toby, 1993). Analyses of data from the Youth in Transition Panel study of boys in 87 public high schools suggested that school-level values and structures had a substantial influence on interpersonal violence and other forms of delinquency (Felson, 1994).

As continued research focuses more attention on the area of school violence, some schools are recognizing the need to review the effectiveness of current practices. Reducing school violence is increasingly seen as a two-pronged approach which requires efforts aimed at introducing pro-social behaviors, as much as implementing effective responses to delinquent behaviors. Programs have slowly evolved to address these needs and include: (a) the development of positive behavior programs that recognize the exemplary acts of students, (b) resources that enable teachers to organize extra-curricular activities to promote a team environment amongst students, (c) student involvement in behavior plan formulation, (d) initiation of school programs that recognize community service as an integral contribution by students, and (e) curriculum that teaches students the skills needed for peaceful and co-operative problem solving (Weissglass, 1996).

Bareham and Clark (1994) pointed out that response to school violence must combine an obligation to deal fairly and effectively with both the victims and the perpetrators. Response to school violence also requires a commitment to address codes of behavior and discipline policies from a sense of compassion, not punishment, fear, or retribution (Heath, 1994).

In their work on pupil control ideology, Willower, Eidell and Hoy (1973) found that teachers approached discipline of students differently in elementary and junior high school. Custodial or highly controlled models were more often present in those settings where teachers were more likely to feel their authority threatened (e.g., junior high). Discipline and control of students was maintained through rules outlining uniform behavioral expectations, and punitive sanctions when necessary. In contrast, elementary teachers saw students as posing less of a threat, due to their size, age and immaturity. For this reason, greater permissiveness, less rigid control, and more positive relationships were nurtured in the younger grades. Willower, Eidell and Hoy recommended that the reverse should occur: more opportunities for self-discipline, negotiated rules and a democratic climate, as students pass from elementary to the older grades. This more humanistic ideology of pupil control,would result in a climate of mutual trust and respect (p. 5). Students would view school as enjoyable, and their teachers as caring and fair.

Research Method

This study was exploratory in that there exists limited research, in Alberta, on students' perceptions of seriously disruptive and violent behaviors in schools. Its primary purpose was to develop a preliminary understanding of the issues so as to guide more in-depth research in the future.

Sample

The sample of students interviewed was influenced by four factors: (a) schools whose principals volunteered to participate, (b) teachers who indicated to their principal an interest in participating, (c) individual students who provided signed consent, and (d) students who were randomly selected from the available pool of volunteers in each of grades 7, 8 and 9.

The sample consisted of 60 grades 7, 8 and 9 students, interviewed in groups of 12 (4 males, 4 females from each of the grades) drawn from five K-9 schools in central Alberta. Three of the schools were rural, and two were urban. In each of the volunteer schools, the principal selected one class of each grade (7, 8 and 9). The researcher spoke with each of these classes and invited the students to participate in the study. In each school, on the day of the interviews, all signed consent forms were sorted by grade and gender. The forms of two boys and two girls, from each grade, were removed randomly from a box. Although given the opportunity to do so, no selected student opted out from the study after their name had been drawn.

School Demographics

Five K-9 schools from the same district participated in the study. Three of the schools were located in an urban centre with a population of approximately 60,000. This community was largely white, lower-middle to middle class with a high percentage of young families. One of these three urban schools was French Immersion.

The remaining two schools in the study were located in small rural communities, approximately 40 miles from the urban centre (one south, one north). The community to the south of the urban centre is largely agricultural, with a high population of retirees. The more northern community is both agricultural and petrochemical. Youth crime, youth gangs, or ethnic tension are not known to be major concerns in any of these three communities.

Interviews

The male and female students from each of the representative grades were asked to come together as a group and discuss the following: (a) what the term "school violence" meant to them; (b) to what extent violent behaviors affected their schooling experience; (c) how school violence was

responded to by staff; (d) the perceived fairness and effectiveness of staff responses to violence; and (e) suggestions for improving how schools deal with the victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violent behaviors. Each focus group interview lasted between one to one and one-half hours.

These discussions were recorded by audiotape and subsequently transcribed. The resulting transcripts provided the data for this study.

Analysis

Analysis of the transcripts identified similarities and differences between how students in each school responded to the interview questions. Emergent "themes" were recognized, based on commonalties of data, and issues identified by the students to be of importance to them.

Findings and Discussion

The findings obtained from the data collected are summarized and discussed in five subsections: (a) definitions of violence, (b) effects of violence on the schooling experience, (c) perceived effectiveness of current strategies and practices, and (d) approaches suggested by students as to how schools could respond to violence more effectively.

Definitions of School Violence

In response to the question "what does school violence mean to you?" students' answers were consistent amongst the selected schools: (a) students considered the threat of physical violence to be more prevalent than actual physical violence, and (b) more students were victims of verbal harassment than physical conflict. The most predominant behaviors cited were related to verbal put-downs, and mean-spirited teasing. Although punching, kicking, shoving, and bullying were mentioned, the majority of students viewed these actions to be occasional.

One group indicated that the type of conflict in junior high was similar to that experienced in the elementary years, the difference being student response: in elementary, students ignored those who teased them, in junior high the response became physical (e.g., hitting). The students of all schools agreed that what they identified as violence was not necessarily the same as what teachers would define. For example, horseplay, joking and teasing amongst friends was often taken too seriously by teacher witnesses.

In general, students recognized that anger was more prevalent in junior high than elementary, but were unclear as to how to manage it. Standards also appeared to have changed: words once prohibited in their earlier grades (e.g., "hell," "pissed-off") were no longer noticed and corrected by teachers. A mutually exhibited lack of respect for members of the school community was noted by all participants,

often resulting in a perception by students that teachers neither respected nor enjoyed being amongst them:

> Not all teachers notice or care about verbal put-downs, especially those who do it themselves to their students.
>
> Elementary teachers are more relaxed...in junior high they just assume that kids are all bad.

Effects of School Violence

Students indicated that verbal put-downs and excessive teasing were often difficult to withstand in junior high school. This appeared to be a contradiction to earlier comments suggesting that teachers took such behaviors too seriously. After further probing, students clarified this to be an indication of different tolerance levels of what constitutes "friendly" and "hostile" teasing- a distinction not always shared between students and teachers.

Students believed that the fear resulting from threats of violence negatively affected their academic performance. They admitted that often, these fears were founded on unsubstantiated or over-exaggerated rumors spread by their peers.

Although some students expressed a fear of being victimized, or punished by classmates for reporting violence, the predominant theme of this portion of the discussion involved the effects of unfair, and ineffective school practices dealing with disruptive behaviors. For example, they believed that teachers were too often co-contributors in the teasing and put-down of some students. This was especially the case with respect to labeling students as "bad," or "troublemakers," often leading to negative reputations:

> I feel really badly about this one boy who is always picked on by the teacher, always put down. Its not always the kids who are the bullies...it made the kid behave worse.

Perceived Effectiveness of Current Strategies and Practices

In general, students considered responses to violence to be inconsistent, unfair and ineffective. Students commented on how the junior high environment appeared to be less caring, as contrasted to their elementary school experience. The use of the word "mean" was used frequently, as a descriptor of staff and overall school climate. The reputations teachers had of students were difficult to change and were perceived to be unduly influential in the determination of punishments and assumption of guilt:

> nothing you do is ever forgotten...every past mistake you've ever done is dragged out whenever you get into trouble, just like a rap sheet, a big-bad-boy list....how can you call that fair treatment?

> smart kids can be just as bad, they are just smart at not getting caught...getting good marks means getting away with alot more stuff

Students unanimously spoke of unrealistic notions of conflict, which teachers shared. For example, they did not believe that it always "takes two to fight," and resented the simple solution teachers opted for, when electing to punish both participants equally. Students felt that too much emphasis was placed on punitive response to violence, as opposed to being offered viable alternatives to resolving conflict. At the same time, they were divided on their desire to have teachers provide them with alternatives, or acceptable options for dealing with conflict:

> ...don't just tell us that we did something wrong, tell us what to do instead...there's too much time spent on ultimatums and not enough on alternatives.

> When they give alternatives, they are stupid, you're not going to just talk it out with the person hitting you...kids don't tell adults because they make it worse.

Students also expressed concern over the inconsistent messages teachers gave regarding the seriousness of certain behaviors:

> You're told that hurting people's feelings is a terrible thing, but then they [teachers] get more upset if something is stolen... "don't threaten people we're told," but then they threaten us all the time with new punishments.

> No matter what you do to a kid in school, even punch them or whatever, it is never as serious as what you do to a teacher, even if you just swear or something. Teachers get away with doing worse stuff, even dragging a kid down the hall by their ear, like last year...

Punishments. Suspensions and detentions were viewed as simplistic solutions that had varying degrees of success, largely dependent on the home environment. As a deterrent, they were deemed effective only in those rare cases, where parents supported the decision of the school. Students felt that parental support of school decisions regarding discipline was decreasing due to: (a) lack of involvement in children's' schooling, (b) disagreement with the school's handling of disciplinary actions, or (c) lack of mutual respect and communication between home and school.

Students also expressed frustration at what they considered illogical consequences for violent behavior, (e.g., writing out lines). This, they felt, did little to educate them on how to better manage conflict in the future:

> ...so what does picking up garbage, sweeping floors, or writing out dictionary lines have to do with what I did? It doesn't make sense, and it doesn't do anything but make us angrier and hate the school more.

In each participant school, students complained about unfair influences on the assignment of punishments, which included: (a) teacher's mood, (b) the weather, (c) teacher's well-being, (d) day of the week, and (e) whether the teacher was trying to impress a colleague. As a deterrent, students felt few punishments were effective. This was especially the case when students were not provided with reasons for their punishment, or offered alternatives for dealing with similar circumstances in the future.

Influence of Gender. Several themes emerged from the discussions, regarding the influence of gender on teachers' responses to violence. Both female and male students agreed that boys were more severely punished if the victim of physical or verbal harassment was a girl. As well, there was general consensus on the issue of boys receiving more severe discipline for identical misbehavior:

> Lots of times guys get in trouble way more than us girls, even if they do the same thing. Guys and us get totally different treatment which is kinda not fair.

Students remarked that although there may have been a time when more male students were involved in violent behaviors (thus deserving their reputation for misbehavior), the increased participation of female students in aggressive behaviors no longer justified the unequal responses from teachers. One group of students expressed concern about the different expectations some teachers had of the coping strategies of victims of verbal harassment: girls were expected to "cry it out, and get over it," whereas boys were told to "suck it up, and be a man." Such statements they felt, offered little to build tolerance and understanding between genders.

Influence of Grade. In three of the five participant schools, students indicated that grade level played a role in the way aggressive behavior was dealt with by school staff. Although they agreed that the victimization of younger students should not be tolerated, there was concern regarding the unrealistic and unfair assumptions teachers often made: (a) younger students always tell the truth, (b) older students always start the altercation, and (c) younger students are powerless.

Increased boredom, in junior high, was considered to be a major factor in student-student conflict. Students felt that resources were unfairly directed at elementary students (e.g., playground equipment) and too often, teachers canceled intramural sports and other activities which could provide options to inactivity:

> They [teachers] tell us to get off stuff or we'll break it, to go outside, to find something to do and when we do they criticize it saying stuff like "no pushing," "no snowballs," "no everything," "no using the slide"...then we play soccer, and the little kids take over the field and we're told to leave because we're too tough and someone could get hurt, it just never ends, all the "nos," I mean.

Students also reflected on what they perceived to be a double standard, with respect to age and expectations:

> They [teachers] keep saying that we should be good role models for the little kids in elementary, that we should know better because we're older. But, how about the teachers, they are older and should know better than to behave the way that they do, like by eating and drinking in class, even though we're not allowed, like yelling and not controlling their anger. There is such a double standard.

Student Suggestions

School Structure. In the urban schools, students believed that smaller class sizes, smaller schools, and maintaining the K-9 structure (rather than a stand-alone junior high) led to a sense of "family" and a reduction in the incidents of violent behaviors:

> Its nice to be in a small school where we've known each other for a long time, and you get to forgive and ignore the stuff that bugs you about other people who get to be like brothers or sisters, you just put up with them...only one problem is in a small school its hard to shake a bad reputation.

In particular, the students in the French Immersion school felt that their small school size, together with their shared culture, resulted in a greater tolerance and understanding for one another. At the same time, they did note that individual differences were not as pronounced in their school, given that the majority of students were white, middle-class francophones.

The benefits of a small school was not a view shared amongst the students from the rural schools:

> A small school is not good because its too full of cliques and there aren't alot of people to choose from as friends. Also, if someone is out to get you its hard in a small school to avoid them.

> In a small school, its really hard to shake off a bad reputation, especially with the teachers. You are labelled and that stays with you forever.

Although there were different opinions on school size, students overwhelmingly endorsed the concept of small class size. However, they could not offer a rationale for how class size effected the nature or extent of violent behaviors.

Prevention Programs. Although prevention was formally endorsed as a strategy for addressing school violence in the district, students felt that conflict resolution and alternative strategies to hostile conflict were seldom, if rarely, discussed in the classroom. Some participants indicated a desire to have this opportunity made available to them. These sentiments were not shared by all students. Some felt that there were too many other variables which influenced student violence (e.g., the media, family) and therefore conflict management programs would not be effective.

Consistency. Students highlighted the need for consistency in the messages given by teachers. For example, although teachers encouraged students to come forward and report violence, they also punished students for getting involved. One student related a story of trying to step in and break up a fight, and was punished for "not minding his own business." Students stated that these were conflicting messages, and offered little in the way of motivating students to care for one another. When they chose not to intervene (especially in the case where a participant in a physical altercation is disadvantaged due to size, age, or strength), students stated that they were left with feelings of guilt and helplessness. This, they believed contributed to a climate of "meanness," and uncaring, found in junior high schools.

Students stated that although teachers often spoke to the seriousness of verbal put-downs, there was inconsistency in how they responded to it. It was suggested that since verbal aggression was often a precursor to physical violence, teachers who acted on incidents of verbal violence, may in turn reduce the number of more serious acts of physical aggression. The need for exemplary role modeling by teachers was a major issue with students:

> Everything they tell us not to do they seem to do: get angry, pick on people, act mean, threaten us, and hold grudges. I don't even think some of them like kids at all.

Climate. The most dominant theme expressed by all students who participated in the study centered on the "meanness" they experienced in junior high:

> Once you get into here [junior high school] they consider you a delinquent, and trouble. I really miss how nice and caring the teachers all were in elementary school...it was a friendlier place.

> Its like I lost my second Mom in elementary and now have prison wardens who are looking out not for me, but for what I am doing bad...no one sees the positive stuff happening anymore.

In this study, students expressed that more should be done to make school a friendlier and more caring environment wherein responsible, and respectful behaviors were practiced by students and staff. Some students offered the following suggestions for teachers: (a) give students a fair hearing when dealing with misbehavior, (b) resist comparisons to other siblings teachers may have taught in the past, (c) extent the right that a student is "innocent until proven guilty," (d) consider the possibility that a student may have abandoned previous misbehavior, and changed their character for the better, and (e) "lighten up" and enjoy teaching and your students.

Mentoring. There was a tremendous appreciation extended towards the interviewer for taking the time to ask students to discuss violence and its effects on their schooling experience. The suggestion came

forward that such "safe" conversations take place more often, and be made accessible to students on a more on-going basis. Although students noted that counselors were available for this purpose, they indicated a reluctance to approach counselors, because of the reputation they had amongst the student body as catering to the "at-risk," and troubled students. As well, students remarked that they did not trust counselors to keep confidential such private conversations, and felt that in general, school staff made matters worse through frequent breeches of trust. An older student (e.g., university student), or an adult not part of the school staff (e.g., professor), were considered the most comfortable choices by most participants.

Deterrents and Punishments. Students offered alternatives to suspensions and detentions, that were directed at more individualized punishments, similar to a behavior contract. For example, students suggested that teachers take the time to determine what would represent a meaningful deterrent (e.g., removal from a school sport's team) for each student, thereby developing more meaningful punishments. This, students recognized, would be more time-consuming for teachers, but would reap greater benefits in the long run, than writing out lines, standing in the hallway, or being sent home for a few days.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was designed to explore students perceptions on: (a) the meaning of school violence, (b) its impact on their schooling experience, and (c) the effectiveness of current strategies that educators practice in dealing with violent behaviors. Ten main findings emerge from the data gathered from this study:

1. Students considered the threat of physical violence to be more prevalent than actual physical violence.
2. More students were victims of verbal harassment than physical conflict.
3. Students considered responses to violence to be inconsistent, unfair and ineffective.
4. Students commented on how the junior high environment appeared to be less caring, as contrasted to their elementary school experience.
5. The reputations teachers had of students were difficult to alter and were perceived to be unduly influential in the determination of punishments and assumption of guilt.
6. Students believed that small sized classes, the K-9 structure and a sense of "family" reduced the incidents of violence.
7. Students believed that the fear resulting from threats of violence negatively affected their academic performance.
8. Students generally considered their junior high school experience to be cold, mean and uncaring.
9. Students felt that too much emphasis was placed on punitive response to violence, as opposed to being offered viable alternatives to resolving conflict.
10. In this study, students expressed that more could be done to make school a more friendly and caring environment wherein responsible, and respectful behaviors were practiced by students and staff.

Students in this study were asked to elaborate on the nature, extent and effects of violence in their schools. And yet, they chose to devote most of the interview time to expressing their frustration at the climate prevalent in their junior high school experience. They spoke of unfair, uncaring practices, and a belief that few opportunities were provided for meaningful participation in dealing with the realities of peer conflicts. Although a number of inconsistencies were noted (e.g., teachers should ignore fun teasing, vs. too much teasing is ignored by teachers), the general consensus was that school practices and policies were partially responsible for fostering a culture of meanness which was evidenced by a lack of respect extended towards students, as well as teachers.

Recommendations

Violent behaviors in schools can be attributed to a combination of societal causes which are not always under the direct control of our educational institutions. At the same time, school violence cannot be viewed as just another societal problem that enters a school in the form of isolated outbursts from "dysfunctional" youth. Central to any discourse on school violence, is an examination of the role that school culture, practices, policies, and staff behavior play in influencing such student behaviors.

By examining the beliefs, values and biases that are practiced in schools, we recognize that schools themselves may be partly responsible for either fostering or rejecting a culture of violence. For example, students often perceive that current school practices do not reflect the fundamental principles of justice or that the school climate cultivates a culture of violence through the lack of empathy and caring towards students. This perception is important to explore further.

Students are indicating that they are not perceiving the effectiveness of a traditional model of discipline: monitor, judge acceptability, and punish when deemed necessary. Such practices do not empower students to take responsibility for regulating their own behavior, or offered alternatives to fear, rejection or retaliation.

Thus, maintaining school safety should require a comprehensive strategy which should not be limited to just responding to violence when it occurs, through sanctions (e.g., detentions, suspensions, expulsions). Discipline, when necessary, should be regarded as an opportunity to teach students social skills, rather than a way of punishing social illiteracy.

As noted by the students themselves, policies and programs are required which focus on the prevention of serious disruptive behaviours, as well as the rehabilitiation of all students who are affected by such behaviours: victims, witnesses and perpetrators. Moreover, students need to be given opportunities to take responsibility for maintaining a safe and caring school, through meaningful and appropriate participation in decisions which affect them. An enhanced awareness and understanding of

the issue of serious disruptive behavior and violence in schools must seek the voice of students. Studies such as this, provide invaluable information, useful to those who will be responsible for the development and implementation of effective policies and approaches for dealing with school violence.

In the eyes of those young people who participated in this study, school should be enjoyable, interesting, and free from harm. Staff should be committed to an ethic of caring, and model behaviors expected of their students. Students need adults who are prepared to take the time to understand the struggles that they are facing, in a world which demands a delicate balance between individual rights and the responsibilities and expectations of society. These would seem a reasonable expectation from a place which demands twelve years of their lives.

"De-meaning" schools requires that we change our belief in, understanding and expectations of traditional models of discipline. Too often, we neglect to validate such practices with students: intelligent, thoughtful people, problem-solvers who are forced to live together on a daily basis (MacDonald, 1996). We assume that increased punishments and sanctions will lead to responsible and respectful behaviors, without asking ourselves, at what level does our pedagogy impart pro-social behaviors on students? What are we modeling by uttering threats for misbehavior? What is the message in continuing to protect the fallacy that "stick and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me?" For those who still cling to past models of achieving order in schools, it will be a challenge to extend to students, those progressive ideologies we value in adult organizations (e.g., shared decision-making, due process, fairness, meaningful participation). "De-meaning" schools will require a focus on social literacy in our curriculum, as well as a genuine concern for the intellectual and emotional needs of all students.

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